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**REALIZING AN INSIGHTFUL VISION OF A POWERFUL
AND INDEPENDENT STATE: AHMAD IBN TULUN
AND THE REIGN OF HIS DYNASTY (868–905)**

The aim of this paper is to presents a significant period in the Egyptian history, i.e., the reign of the Ṭulūnids (868–905), the first Muslim dynasty of independent governors and rulers of Egypt. In my portrayal of the Ṭulūnid state, I applied Ibn Khaldūn's theory of power-state.¹ Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406) an Arab Muslim historiographer and historian, regarded to be among the founding fathers of modern sociology is well known for both his theoretical structure for the analysis of history and his explanation of the nature of state and society. While analyzing the process of rise and fall of various tribes and dynasties he discovered natural laws that govern it.

According to his theory of the power-state, the state constitutes a natural and necessary human institution that has a life on its own determined by the law of causality. Furthermore, it is also the political and social unit, which alone makes human civilization possible. The state goes through five phases: conquest, the building up of the dynasty, the attainment of the peak, decline and downfall. While applying this theory in my paper I distinguished various phases in the development Ṭulūnids' regime and I analyzed them focusing on political, economic, social and cultural aspects. According to Ibn Khaldūn, in a given state "the economic and political developments go hand in hand."² This statement proved to be appropriate in the case of the Ṭulūnids' example.

¹ See: E.I. Rosenthal, *The Theory of the Power-State: Ibn Khaldun's Study of Civilization*, [in:] idem, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam: An Introductory Outline*, Cambridge 1958.

² *Ibidem*, p. 91.

Egypt conquered by the caliphate in the year 641, was regarded economically as the most important province in the empire. This province was rich in goldmines, cotton, and papyrus and had fully developed its farming and weaving. This was a substantial source of revenue for the caliphate. Obviously, because of these important economic benefits Egypt was under very strict control from the beginning. Most of the revenue from the province either was sent to the caliph's treasury or went directly to the governor's pocket. Egypt was simultaneously treated as a transit point for the caliphate's escapades to North Africa and Spain. The economic exploitation of Egypt by the 'Umayyads³ had a negative impact on its political aspirations. When 'Abbāsids⁴ came to power, the situation did not change for the better because "the treasury of the caliphate was much more important than the development of the province as a political body."⁵

Striving for power, autonomy and influences

Up until the year 868, when Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn (835–884) appeared on Egypt's political stage as a man of power and influences, the province was almost completely

³ The 'Umayyads (661–750) the first great Muslim dynasty, based in Damascus. They transformed the Islamic state from a theocracy to an Arab monarchy. In 661 'Alī, the last Orthodox caliph was murdered and Mu'awiya, the governor of Syria, became the first 'Umayyad caliph who provided the essential centralization for the survival and continuing expansion of the Arab Empire. At its height, the 'Umayyad rule extended from the Atlantic coast of North Africa to India and from Central Asia to the Yemen. The success of the dynasty carried within it the seeds of its own destruction. The economic and social structure of the empire was dependent on the conquest of new lands. Therefore, any setbacks or reverses caused resentment and dissatisfaction. In addition, the secular nature of the dynasty aroused opposition amongst those in favor of a more theocratic state. In 747, a revolution against the 'Umayyads began in Khurassan and by 750 their regime was defeated and replaced by the rule of the 'Abbāsids, based in Iraq. Only one branch of the 'Umayyads survived by fleeing to Spain where the dynasty continued to rule until 1051. See: H. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates, 600–1050*, London 1986; G.R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate, AD 661–750*, London–New York 2000; A. Bewley, *Mu'awiya, Restorer of the Muslim Faith*, London 2002; M. Gordon, *The Rise of Islam*, Westport CT 2005. Also refer to: D. Madeyska, *Historia świata arabskiego. Okres klasyczny od starożytności do końca epoki Umajjadów (750)*, Warszawa 1999.

⁴ The 'Abbāsids (750–1258), the second dynasty in Islam was founded by the descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad's youngest uncle, 'Abbās Ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib (566–653), in Kufa in 750. In 762, the 'Abbāsids moved their capital to Baghdād. Within 150 years of gaining control of Persia, the caliphs were forced to cede power to local dynastic emirs who only nominally acknowledged their authority. The 'Abbāsid historical period lasting to 1258 (Mongol conquest of Baghdād) is considered the Islamic Golden Age. During this period the Muslim world became an intellectual center for science, philosophy, medicine and education. The 'Abbāsids promoted knowledge and established the House of Wisdom in Baghdād, where both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars sought to gather and translate the available works from the entire world into Arabic and Persian. They synthesized and significantly advanced the knowledge gained from the ancient Roman, Chinese, Indian, Persian, Egyptian, North African, Greek and Byzantine civilizations. See: H. Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate: A Political History*, London–New York 1981; J. Lassner, *The Shaping of 'Abbāsid Rule*, Princeton 1980; A.K. Bennison, *The Great Caliphs: The Golden Age of the Abbasid Empire*, London 2009. Also refer to: J. Hauziński, *Burzliwe dzieje Kalifatu Bagdadzkiego*, Warszawa–Kraków 1993.

⁵ J. Danecki, *Dynastia Tulunidów*, "As-Sadaka" 1983, Vol. 27, p. 33.

dependent on the caliphate. However, despite the financial exploitation, it remained relatively strong and stable as economic organism. This fact helped Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn to execute with precision his brave political plan, namely to build, in only four years, powerful and practically independent state and government. The Western and Eastern historians consider Ibn Ṭūlūn a leader whose appearance on the political stage of Egypt brought significant and long-lasting changes in the province. One may say that he restored the magnificence of the ancient Egypt under the new, i.e., Islamic circumstances by applying in the province his own rules and laws. His strong political leadership together with his great achievements in realizing his vision of an independent state and government remains an interesting material for discussions and assessments.

The history of the Ṭūlūnid family, who practically independently governed Egypt from the year 868 to 905, focuses on the careers of its first two prominent members, namely Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn Abu-l-‘Abbās born in Sāmarrā or Baghdād in 835 and his son Khumārawayh who succeeded his father in 884.⁶ According to Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī⁷, Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn was the son of a young Turkish slave Kassima (or Mashima).⁸ Other historians, including Al-Balawī, claim that Aḥmad was not the son of Ṭūlūn⁹ but according to their information, Kassima was a slave of Ṭūlūn and when Aḥmad was born Ṭūlūn decided to adopt him.¹⁰

Aḥmad received his military training in Sāmarrā and afterwards studied theology and law in Ṭarsūs. He attended lessons from great theologians, jurists, and philosophers. It is worth noting that Aḥmad’s taste for these lessons was augmentative. He desired to study with the greatest scholars and, therefore, requested from Ubayyad Alla Ibn Yaḥyā, the first minister of the caliph, permission to leave the court and devote more time for his studies.¹¹

In the year 868, Ibn Ṭūlūn obtained from the governor of Egypt Bāyakkbāk, his father-in-law, a position of deputy governor, i.e., the military commander. When

⁶ J.-J. Marcel, *Egypte, Depuis la conquête des arabes jusqu’à la domination française*, Paris 1848, p. 53–82. Also refer to: Z. M. Hasan, *Les Tulunides: étude de l’Egypte musulmane a la fin du IX siècle: 868–905*, Paris 1933.

⁷ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī (1445–1505), a famous Egyptian historian, philosopher, jurist and theologian, known as Ibn al-Kutub (the son of books) was also a writer, religious scholar, juristic expert and teacher whose works deal with a wide variety of issues concerning Islamic theology.

⁸ According to Al-Balawī the name was Qāsim (Al-Balawī, *Sīrat Aḥmad bin Ṭūlūn*, ed. M. Kurd ‘Alī, Damascus 1939, p. 33). See also Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh*, Vol. 4, p. 385, where the slave’s name is Nāsim.

⁹ Ṭūlūn (Tolun), was a Turkish slave from Bukhara. He was sent by the governor of Bukhara with the tribute to the caliph Al-Ma’mun.

¹⁰ For a thorough account on the life of Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn, including the history of the family, refer to: Al-Balawī, *Sīrat Amid bin Ṭūlūn*. The manuscript was discovered in about 1935 by Muḥammad Kurd ‘Alī. He edited it with a long introduction and useful commentary. The book was published in 1939 in Damascus. (Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad al-Balawī, known as Al-Balawī was a tenth-century Egyptian historian about whom there is little information.

¹¹ J.-J. Marcel, *Egypte, Depuis la conquête...*, p. 55–56.

he entered Al-Fustāt to assume the office, Ibn al-Mudabbir – the powerful and skilful intendant of finances, whose intolerably cunning exactions and greed had earned the hatred of the Egyptians – came to receive him surrounded by his usual escort. In order to secure his “friendship” with the new military commander, Ibn al-Mudabbir offered Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn 10,000 dinars.¹² The new deputy governor refused the gold and instead asked for the one hundred slaves who followed Ibn al-Mudabbir. This was the first smart move on Ibn Ṭūlūn’s path towards obtaining power and independence in Egypt.

It is worth noting that the political conditions in the province during the discussed period suited his aspirations. The governors were fearful of loosing their profitable relations with the caliphs, and they preferred the court life in Sāmarrā or Baghdād to their provincial residence. Therefore, in the absence of the governor it was much easier for Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn to realize his ambitious political plan, that is, to gradually gain the uncontrolled power over the province. During this period, characterized by Ibn Ṭūlūn’s rising power and influence, one witnesses the first three phases of the state’s development, as described by Ibn Khaldūn’s theory of the power-state:

The first phase is that in which the new group bent on domination, gains its objective and is victorious over its enemies, seizes the reins of power and wrests it from the ruling dynasty. In this phase the ruler is the exemplary leader of his men to gain authority, acquire property, defend, and protect the newly gained territory... In the second phase he becomes sovereign and alone exercises rule without his followers... The third phase is one of quiet ease and leisure to gather the fruits of rule and domination, since human nature tends to acquire wealth and to leave behind... fame.¹³

From the year 868 and throughout the next four years, Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn engaged himself in various endeavors to remove Ibn al-Mudabbir, and to obtain the control over the administration. The two men fought out mainly through the medium of their agents and “connections” at Sāmarrā, and, eventually, their struggle resulted in the removal of Ibn al-Mudabbir.¹⁴

In 870, after the murder of Bāyākḇāk, Yārjūkh was appointed as governor of Egypt. He married off one of his daughters to Ibn Ṭūlūn and confirmed him in his post as vice-governor. Yārjūkh also invested Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn with the authority to govern Al-Iskandariyya and Barqa.

The government established by Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn was based on a strong and highly disciplined army of Turkish and Negro slaves as well as Greek mercenaries.¹⁵ The initial step towards the creation of the Ṭūlūnid army came in 870,

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 62.

¹³ E.I. Rosenthal, *The Theory of the Power-State...*, p. 81.

¹⁴ J.-J. Marcel, *Egypte, Depuis la conquête...*, p. 66.

¹⁵ According Al-Ya’qūbī, during the ceremony held in 871 Ibn Ṭūlūn had his forces swear personal allegiance to him. See: S. and N. Ronart, *Concise Encyclopedia of Arabic Civilization*, Djambata–Amsterdam 1959, p. 536–539.

with the revolt of ‘Īsā Ibn Shaykh, the governor of Palestine. This revolt gave Ibn Ṭūlūn the opportunity to obtain the caliph’s authorization to purchase a large number of slaves in order to subjugate the rebels. For the first time, Egypt possessed its own military force, completely independent of the caliphate. The annual cost of its upkeep amounted to 9000.000 dinars.¹⁶ Apart from establishing a new army, Ibn Ṭūlūn also focused on strengthening the fleet by constructing new naval defenses and stations.¹⁷

Enjoying political stability and economic prosperity

Within a few years, Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn gained almost uncontrolled power in the province and practically built “a state inside a state.” He skillfully consolidated his position by regular remittances of substantial tributes, which satisfied the caliph’s treasury.¹⁸ In this way Ibn Ṭūlūn gained the favor of the ‘Abbāsīd courtiers. It was to Ibn Ṭūlūn, and not to Ibn Al-Mudabbir’s successor, that the caliph Al-Mu‘tamīd (870–892) addressed his requests for Egyptian contributions to the treasury. Furthermore, Al-Mu‘tamīd placed the financial administration of Egypt and the Syrian Marches under Ibn Ṭūlūn, so he could personally monitor them by keeping their total worth a secret from his brother Al-Muwaffaq. Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn’s success resulted from both his intelligent and perfectly executed plan and from the political difficulties of the ‘Abbāsīds. Caliph Al-Mu‘tamīd had recognized his brother Al-Muwaffaq as heir to the throne after his own son Ja‘far (later named Al-Muwaffaq) and had divided the empire between the two presumptive heirs. Al-Muwaffaq received the Eastern provinces as an apanage and Al-Muwaffaq the Western provinces. This decision gave Al-Muwaffaq supreme power. One should also point out that in those days the caliphate was frequently threatened in the East by various attacks and independence movements. Especially dangerous was the revolt of the Zinj in the South that required intervention of large military forces of the caliphate and, in particular, the forces of Al-Muwaffaq.¹⁹ In addition, Al-Muwaffaq, the only man capable to stand against Ibn Ṭūlūn’s growing power and influences, was troubled by several threats, such as the disorders in the administration, the internal conflicts between the caliph and himself, and by the doubtful loyalty on the part of the captains of Turkish regiments.

In order to strengthen his power in Egypt Ibn Ṭūlūn established an excellent intelligence service, providing him with valuable information on all the intrigues

¹⁶ H.A.R. Gibb, *Ṭūlūnids*, [in:] *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 834; M.S. Gordon, *Ṭūlūnids*, [in:] *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, Vol. 10, p. 616–618.

¹⁷ In order to maintain his hold in Syria, he built a naval base at ‘Akkā.

¹⁸ On at least two occasions, namely in 871 and 875–876 Ibn Ṭūlūn remitted considerable sums of revenue, along with gifts, to the ‘Abbāsīd central administration. See: G.M. Frantz, *Saving and Investment*, Ph.D. dissertation, Ann Arbor MI 1978, p. 54–58. In his research, Frantz relied extensively on the analysis of surviving papyri and cited from the research of N. Abbot and A. Grohmann.

¹⁹ J.-J. Marcel, *Egypte, Depuis la conquête...*, p. 69.

spun against him. It is also worth noting that Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn was attentive to the needs of the common people. He paid considerable attention to assure the respect for human rights, such as the freedom of belief, individual responsibility, right to justice, protection of life, etc.²⁰

Ibn Ṭūlūn's government was based on the three important offices – the governor, the vice-governor and the intendant of the finances. As for the governor, he was the figurehead because he spent most of the time at the caliph's court in Sāmarrā or Baghdād. The position of the vice-governor, i.e., the deputy was taken by Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn. He was the real head of state and government in the province of Egypt. The third important office was that of the intendant of the finances, i.e., the head of the administration. This office was also controlled by Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn. Taking into consideration a few important facts – that the governor was most of the time absent in Egypt, that the control over the administration practically gave Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn an "independence," and that both political and economic situation in the caliphate was unstable – one may conclude that under the circumstances Ibn Ṭūlūn's power could seriously undermine the 'Abbāsīd authority.

As previously mentioned, according to Ibn Khaldūn, "the economic and political developments go hand in hand."²¹ Therefore, the prosperity of Egypt under Ibn Ṭūlūn was due principally to his consolidated power. He was in a position to refuse sending extra financial assistance to the caliph and used to send him only the previously agreed-upon amounts of money.

The reign of Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn brought progressive changes in the province. His agrarian and administrative reforms encouraged the peasants to cultivate their lands with zeal, despite the heavy charges on their production. It is also worth noting that Ibn Ṭūlūn put an end to the exaction of the taxes and other charges by the officers of the fiscal administration, who used them for their personal profit. Because of the strict control, the greater part of the province's revenue remained in Egypt. Therefore, Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn had at his disposal enough money to invest in order to stimulate the administration and develop commerce and industry.²²

As for the Ṭūlūnid administrative system in Egypt, one may notice in its development a few important features. The chancery (*diwān al-insha*) was based on the model of the chancery of the 'Abbāsīds. In order to keep good relation with the local population, Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn held regular public sessions for people from other religions. In addition, Jews and Christians were employed in the administration. Ibn Ṭūlūn replaced Irāqī officials with the local Egyptian bureaucracy.²³ A number of famous jurists worked on regulations concerning the law and admini-

²⁰ J. Danecki, *Dynastia Tulunidów...*, p. 34.

²¹ E.I. Rosenthal, *The Theory of the Power-State...*, p. 91.

²² The historical sources confirmed a significant increase of revenue from *kharaj*. In addition to the income from *kharaj*, the treasury received the annual rent from *al-amlāk* (the royal domains), which were administrated in the name of the governor of Egypt. *Ibidem*, p. 835.

²³ G.M. Frantz, *Saving and Investment*, Ph. D. diss., Ann Arbor MI 1978, p. 267.

stration for Ibn Ṭūlūn's government. *The Fihrist of Al-Nadīm* informs us that Al-Ṭahāwī (a famous jurist from Irāq) "worked over [sic] a book for Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn about marriage of the lawfully owned, in which he made lawful for him marriage of slaves."²⁴

As for the Ṭūlūnid economic and financial policies, Aḥmad relied on the powerful merchant community for both financial and diplomatic support. According to Frantz, the important evidence points to a stable and prosperous economy closely administered by the Egyptian bureaucracy and propitious levels of agricultural production blessed by consistent high flooding.²⁵ The strength of the Ṭūlūnid economy resulted from a complex of long-term socio-economic factors and more immediate reforms on the part of Ibn al-Mudabbir in the period prior to Ibn Ṭūlūn's appointment and the Ṭūlūnid administration itself. The measures in question included changes in the tax assessment and the collection system, an expansion in the use of tax-contracts (itself the source of an emerging land-holding élite in this period), and investment and repairs in the agricultural infrastructure. It is worth noting that the key sector of production, investment, and participation in Mediterranean-wide commerce was textiles and in particular, the production of linen.²⁶

Public projects initiated by Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn reflected both practical and ideological concerns and were primarily focused on the development of Al-Fustāt and its environs. Ibn Ṭūlūn decided to change the architectonic plan of the city, refashion the streets and markets, and build a hospital, aqueduct, and beautiful houses.²⁷ On the canal, which crosses the city of Cairo today, he built the bridge, i.e., the "Bridge of Lions." There he founded the citadel, distributed the portions of lands to his army officers, and ordered them to build houses and to live there. In this new district called Al-Qaṭā'i, Ibn Ṭūlūn founded a magnificent palace in which the seat of his government was located.²⁸ Al-Qaṭā'i soon became a largely inhabited and lively district, full of markets, shops, and gardens.²⁹ As for Ibn Ṭūlūn private residence, he lived in Al-ʿAskar district, in a palace with a gorgeous view of the Al-Moqaṭṭam hills.

Regarding the cultural life of Egypt, the Ṭūlūnid regime introduced a number of positive changes. The ruler, who had received a liberal education, showed himself as a keen patron of learning and of the arts. He encouraged the development of education in Egypt. It is worth noting that a trace of his activities concerning the cultural matters can be found in a document related to the endowment of a mosque-school at Ushmunain.³⁰ Ibn Ṭūlūn, and later his son Khumārawayh, like all the enlightened rulers took care not only to please the people by free distribution

²⁴ *The Fihrist of Al-Nadīm*, ed. and transl. B. Dodge, Vol. 1, New York–London 1970, p. 512.

²⁵ G.M. Frantz, *Saving and Investment...*, p. 280.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 281–285.

²⁷ J.-J. Marcel, *Egypte, Depuis la conquete...*, p. 66–68.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 74.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 65.

³⁰ H.A.R. Gibb, *Ṭūlūnids...*, p. 836.

of food or entertainment spectacles, but also by respecting their hard work and by improving their economic status. One may say that by assuring the support of the local population, the Ṭūlūnids were able to protect their interests.

Facing some difficulties and unexpected threats

When Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn strengthened his position as a powerful, independent, and sovereign ruler, he even felt strong enough to organize military campaigns in order to conquer new territories and extend his rule over Syria, Palestine, and the frontier zone with Byzantium.³¹ The initial steps towards rule over Syria and of the frontier zone with Byzantium included two Ibn Ṭūlūn's campaigns of, i.e., in 878 and 882, during which he secured the allegiance of the military governors in major Syrian cities, with the exception of Ṭarsūs. He proclaimed himself the governor of Damascus and left his lieutenant Lu'Lu', a former Turkish slave, in command of the city. In addition, Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn gained control over a new naval base at 'Akkā which considerably increased his military and financial resources. However, it also brought Aḥmad into an open conflict with his sovereign and involved him in all the unrests and antagonisms.³² Despite the fact that the conquest of Syria added to Ibn Ṭūlūn's army new forces, it did not result in strengthening its ties with Egypt. It is also worth noting that in 878, Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn had to face another challenge which seriously threatened the stability of his position. The revolt of his son 'Abbās on the Syrian-Byzantine border resulted in defections of high-ranking officers, and in particular, that of Lu'Lu' to Al-Muwaffaq.³³

However, despite the surfacing difficulties, Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn was still strong enough to manifest his power and independent authority. After the Syrian campaign, he began to add his own name to those of the caliph and the governor on the golden coins.³⁴ Furthermore, in order to demonstrate his supreme power and independence, he built his mosque in a newly established quarter of Al-Qaṭā'i'. The famous tower of Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn's mosque combines some features borrowed from the Sāmarrān architecture as well as from some local patterns.³⁵

³¹ Ahmadjur, the governor of Syria, wrote a letter to the caliph Al-Mu'tamid saying that the military forces of Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn increased dangerously. After this Ibn Ṭūlūn received an order from the caliph to come to Sāmarrā immediately. Instead, he sent Aḥmad Al-Wāsiṭī there, his secretary and a key member of his inner circle. See: J.-J. Marcel, *Egypte, Depuis la conquête...*, p. 70.

³² J. Danecki, *Dynastia Tulunidów...*, p. 34–35.

³³ M.S. Gordon, *Ṭūlūnids...*, p. 617.

³⁴ D. Sourdel, *Aḥmad B. Ṭūlūn*, [in:] *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, Vol. 1, p. 279; O. Grabar, *The Coinage of The Tulunids*, New York 1957.

³⁵ The Mosque of Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn is the most probably the oldest in the city surviving in its original form. Al-Maqrīzī lists the mosque's construction start date as 876 and the mosque's original inscription slab identifies the date of completion as 879 (Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, II, p. 265). See: J.-J. Marcel, *Egypte, Depuis la conquête...*, p. 71–73. It took two years to build the mosque (875–877). The cost of the whole construction was about 120,000 dinars. In the mosque Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn placed a frieze contain the verses from Qur'an. See: D. Behrens-Abouseif, *Islamic Architecture in Cairo:*

In 882, Ibn Ṭūlūn invited the nearly powerless Caliph Al-Mu'tamid to Egypt offering him protection against his brother Al-Muwaffaq, who had been given authority over Baghdad by Al-Mu'tamid. Due to the fact that Al-Mu'tamid was intercepted *en route* to Egypt, and Ibn Ṭūlūn and Al-Muwaffaq began an endless campaign against each other.³⁶ Being afraid of Ibn Ṭūlūn's growing power and political aspirations, Al-Muwaffaq decided to appoint Ishak Ibn Kundadj as governor of Egypt and Syria. In response, Ibn Ṭūlūn had a group of prominent jurists declare Al-Muwaffaq an usurper. In addition, both leaders had the each other cursed during Friday prayers. Al-Muwaffaq compelled the caliph to have Aḥmad cursed in the mosques in Mesopotamia, while Aḥmad had the same measures applied to Al-Muwaffaq in the mosques of Egypt and Syria.³⁷ However, Al-Muwaffaq, although finally victorious in his war with the Zinj, decided to employ some diplomatic steps to reach a compromising agreement with Ibn Ṭūlūn, which was to achieve what he had failed to gain by an open conflict with him. Al-Muwaffaq's first diplomatic approaches met with positive response from Ibn Ṭūlūn. In March of 884, the negotiations were broken off by the sudden death of Ibn Ṭūlūn.

Although Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn, and later his son Khumārawayh, did not spare their efforts to gain support of the religious leaders, the difficulties encountered by their state and government were, at times, increased by a certain tension with the theologians. During the conflicts between the Ṭūlūnids and the caliphate, the religious leaders usually sided with the caliph and regarded Aḥmad and Khumārawayh as usurpers.³⁸

The years of successors

Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn was succeeded by his son Khumārawayh, who continued his father's policy of and pursued the process of reforms.³⁹ Although the political situation remained relatively stable, Khumārawayh had to face the invasion of Syria by Al-Muwaffaq aimed at separating Syria from Egypt and, consequently inhibiting the expansion of the Ṭūlūnids. During the year 885 the 'Abbāsīd army conquered Damascus. In response, Khumārawayh went with his troops to Syria and soon regained areas conquered by Al-Muwaffaq. It is worth noting that both political and military gains enabled Khumārawayh to extend Egyptian authority into the Jazīra and finally (in 890) over Ṭarsūs. As mentioned by Haarman, the

An Introduction, Cairo 1989; N. Warner, *The Monuments of Historic Cairo: A Map and Descriptive Catalogue*, Cairo 2005.

³⁶ J.-J. Marcel, *Egypte, Depuis la conquete...*, p. 79–81.

³⁷ J. Danecki, *Dynastia Tulunidów...*, p. 34–35.

³⁸ H.A.R. Gibb, *Ṭūlūnids...*, p. 835.

³⁹ U. Haarman, *Khumārawayh B. Aḥmad B. Ṭūlūn*, [in:] *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, Vol. 5, p. 49–50; Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh*, Vol. 4, p. 396.

two treaties negotiated with the ‘Abbāsids during the discussed period, indicate the extent of the Ṭulūnids’ prominence in the near Eastern political stage.⁴⁰ The first treaty, reached with Al-Muwaffaq in 886, recognized the formal Ṭulūnid authority over Egypt and the regions of Syria for a period of thirty years in exchange for a trifling tribute.⁴¹ The second treaty, negotiated with the new caliph Al-Mu’taḍid in 892, confirmed the terms of the earlier accord. However, one should also note that both treaties also included provisions confirming the status of the Egyptian governor as a vassal of the ‘Abbāsids.

During the first period of Khumārawayh’s reign, the power of the Ṭulūnids reached its apogee. At that time, the “fourth phase” of Ibn Khaldūn’s power-state could be observed:

the ruler is satisfied with what his predecessors have built up, lives in peace with friendly and hostile rulers of his kind and imitates his precursors...as well as he can.⁴²

Aḥmad Ibn Ṭulūn left his successor with a tremendous inheritance. According to information from Ibn Taghrībirdī,⁴³ the heritage included 70,000 mamlūks and 24,000 other soldiers, 10 millions dinārs in gold (yearly income – one-million dinārs in gold), and in addition, 7,000 horses and 6,000 donkeys.⁴⁴

The financial matters were still under the control of Aḥmad Ibn Ṭulūn’s right-hand man Aḥmad al-Wāsiṭī. The administrative system, established by Ibn Ṭulūn, functioned quite well. In the first period of his reign, Khumārawayh continued the political line of his father. He developed the province especially in the sphere of commerce, agriculture, and textile industry. Furthermore, he pursued the task of modernizing the irrigation system in Egypt, cleaning the canal of Al-Iskandariyya and building wells to bring drinking water for the city population. Like his father, he paid considerable attention to the development of education and culture. It is also worth noting that Khumārawayh’s profound interest in painting, music and sculpture contributed to the flourishing of local arts and crafts.⁴⁵

During the second period of his reign, Khumārawayh focused more on his private life than on politics. The expenses for his court, the construction and decoration of the palace, and the pleasure gardens, depicted by his biographers exhausted the treasury, demoralized the civil administration and dangerously weakened the army. As an example to his extravagance, one should mention the wedding of his twelve-year-old daughter with the new caliph Mu’taḍid. The beauty of the bride and the

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 49.

⁴¹ H.A.R. Gibb, *Ṭulūnids...*, p. 834.

⁴² E.I. Rosenthal, *The Theory of the Power-State...*, p. 89.

⁴³ Ibn Taghrībirdī (1411–1469) was a famous Egyptian historian born into a family of Turkish Mamlūk élite of the 15th century Cairo. He studied under Al-‘Aynī and Al-Maqrīzī, two of the leading Cairene historians and scholars of the day. His most famous work is a multi-volume chronicle of Egypt and the Mamluk sultanate called *Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa’l-Qāhira*.

⁴⁴ J. Danecki, *Dynastia Tulunidów...*, p. 33.

⁴⁵ H.A.R. Gibb, *Ṭulūnids...*, p. 836.

magnificent dowry of Khumārawayh's daughter Qatr al-Nadā are still remembered in many popular tales.⁴⁶ In this period of his reign began the fifth phase of Ibn Khaldūn's power-state:

This fifth phase is one of extravagances and waste. In this phase, the ruler destroys what his ancestors have brought together, for the sake and pleasure. For he is generous towards his intimates and liberal at his banquets in order to win...the scum of the people, whom he entrusts with great tasks which they are unable to the noble and distinguished among his people and with the followers of his predecessors, so that they are filled with hatred against him and agree among themselves to desert him. Moreover, he loses part of his troops because he spends their pay on his pleasures and prevents them from getting to know him personally...In this phase the natural aging of the dynasty (that is, the decay) sets in; a chronic disease gets hold of it without remedy or release until it collapses.⁴⁷

At that time, the financial administration began to deteriorate. Although the historical sources did not preserve the details, the symptoms of a downfall of the Ṭūlūnid state could be inferred from both the overall situation in the government and from the actions of Khumārawayh observed during the second period of his reign. As for the major symptoms of the Ṭūlūnids' downfall, one should underline: (1) the gradual decline of discipline in the civil administration and the army, (2) the expenses exceeding the possibilities of the government, (3) the numerous intrigues at the court, including a plot to kill the ruler and (4) the easygoing attitude towards the *amīrs* in allowing them a free hand in the management of their estates. In conclusion, at the death of Khumārawayh, the state and government established by his father Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn was in the process of disintegration, and the downfall of the Ṭūlūnid dynasty was only a question of time.⁴⁸

With time, the situation was getting worse and the intrigues inside the army and between the successors and Khumārawayh's family increased. The atmosphere in the army changed and some fractions inside of it began to fight each other in order to rule and gain power.⁴⁹ Khumārawayh's son Ibn 'Asākir Jaysh who in the year 895 succeeded his father was deposed by his brother Harūn. During the reign of Harūn Ibn Khumārawayh (896–904), the central government lost almost all control of the army dominated by the Greek mercenaries.

The disturbances and intrigues inside the army and between the successors and family of Khumārawayh constituted a threat for the survival of the dynasty. The Qarmatians, the strong *shī'a* sect based in Syria became strong and politically influential.⁵⁰ The actions of the Qarmatians posed a serious threat not only for the

⁴⁶ There is no doubt that the dowry of some 400,000 dīnars, brought by Khumārawayh's daughter Qatr al-Nadā to her wedding heavily drained the Ṭūlūnid treasury. See: G.M. Frantz. *Saving and Investment...*, p. 67.

⁴⁷ E.I. Rosenthal, *The Theory of the Power-State...*, p. 89.

⁴⁸ J. Danecki, *Dynastia Tulunidów...*, p. 37.

⁴⁹ The principal commanders in Egypt, namely, Badr, Safi and Fa'ik, each obtained control of a portion of the troops and drew on the revenues of the state for their upkeep. For example, the general Tughdj ibn Djuff was practically independent in Damascus.

⁵⁰ The Qarmatians (Arabic: *Qarāmita* "Those Who Wrote in Small Letters") were a *shī'a* Ismā'īlī group based in eastern Arabia, where in 899, they attempted to establish an utopian republic.

Ṭūlūnids but even also for the caliphate. The sectarians rejected all Muslim authorities. The Ṭūlūnid army attempted to eliminate this dangerous movement. However, Harūn involved in private intrigues and deserted by some of his best generals was not able to lead a successful campaign while the well-organized and determined Qarmatians spread destruction all over Syria. In the case of the Ṭūlūnid dynasty, one may agree with the following statement of Ibn Khaldūn:

The dynasty has a natural term of life like an individual... term of life of a dynasty does not normally exceed three generations. In the first generation there are still preserved the characteristic features of rough, uncivilized rural life (*badawa*), such as hard conditions life, courage, ferocity and partnership in authority... Therefore the strength of the '*Asabiya*' is maintained... and men submit to their domination. In the second generation their condition have changed, under the influence of the rule (*mulk*)... from rural to city-life, from struggle to ease and abundance, from partnership in authority to generation that has forgotten the time of *badawa*... as if it had never existed – unlike the second generation which lives on the memory of the first – and loses the sweetness of force and '*Asabiya*' because they are in possession of power. Ease reaches its peak under them because they become used to a pleasant and abundant life... The '*Asabiya*' collapses completely, and they forget about defense, attack and pursuit (of the enemy).⁵¹

The political and economic difficulties of the Ṭūlūnids during the reign of Harūn Ibn Khumārawayh led the caliph Al-Muktafi (902–908) to organize a campaign to reconquer Egypt. The 'Abbāsīd fleet attacked the Ṭūlūnid fleet on the Mediterranean Sea, and in the year 904, near Tinnis, they destroyed it completely. Two of the caliph Al-Muktafi's armies, one advancing through Iraq and Palestine and the other landing at Damietta conquered Al-Fuṣṭāṭ, and the fortress-residence of the Ṭūlūnids in the district of Al-Qaṭā'i' was completely destroyed. Although Harūn had managed to escape from Tinnis, his cousins who had waited to kill him in Egypt. One of the murderers, namely Shaybān, even went to Al-Fuṣṭāṭ to declare himself governor. However, the soldiers rejected his authority asking the 'Abbāsīds for help. Twelve days later, the 'Abbāsīd army entered Al-Fuṣṭāṭ. Shaybān was deposed in 905. The army plundered the city and the inhabitants were treated with extreme cruelty. The surviving males of the Ṭūlūnid family were carried in chains to Baghdād and kept there in secret.⁵²

Ṭūlūnid's short-lived regime (868–905) holds a significant place in the history of Egypt. Since the days of Cleopatra, it was practically the first independent regime, and for the first time it extended Egyptian rule over Syria. The new Islamic government established by Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn brought fundamental changes in the province concerning political and economic aspects, developed social life, and influenced culture, arts, and literature. One may agree with Muslim and Western historians that in the history of Egypt the Ṭūlūnid period was one of marked material prosperity and progress for the local population and was later recalled as the Golden Age:

⁵¹ E.I. Rosenthal, *The Theory of the Power-State...*, p. 88.

⁵² Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh*, Vol. 4, p. 402–403.

Kānat min ghurari 'l-duwali wa-ayyāmuhum min maḥāsini 'l-ayyām (They were numbered among the most brilliant of dynasties, and their days among the most beneficent of days).⁵³

All in all, it should be underlined that Aḥmad Ibn Ṭulūn, a great political leader through his bravery, unusual organizing ability, rare spirit and personality built, in a relatively short period of time, a practically independent state and government. His insightful vision helped him to achieve a success for which usually few generations have to work. Unfortunately, his successors (except Khumārawayh in the first period of his reign) were not able to carry on with his great plan, and after forty years of rule, the Ṭulūnid dynasty had to leave.

Plan budowy silnego i niezależnego państwa: Aḥmad Ibn Ṭulūn i rządy założonej przez niego dynastii (868–905)

W historii cywilizacji muzułmańskiej pojawiło się wielu wybitnych przywódców, których działania niejednokrotnie zmieniały diametralnie sytuację w danym kraju czy rejonie. Takim miejscem był Egipt, a przykładem postaci niezwykle ważnej w jego wczesnej muzułmańskiej historii – Aḥmad Ibn Ṭulūn (835–884). Omawiając karierę polityczną Aḥmada Ibn Ṭulūna, który z wielką determinacją i charyzmą zbudował w Egipcie niezależny rząd i państwo, wykorzystano teorię silnego państwa Ibn Khaldūna. Pozwoliło to na pełniejsze wyeksponowanie prawidłowości rządzących kolejnymi fazami historycznego procesu, obejmującego powstanie, rozwój, rozkwit, schyłek i upadek założonej przez niego dynastii Ṭulūnidów.

słowa kluczowe: Ṭulūnidzi, Egipt, Aḥmad Ibn Ṭulūn, Khumārawayh

⁵³ H.A.R. Gibb, *Ṭulūnids...*, p. 836.